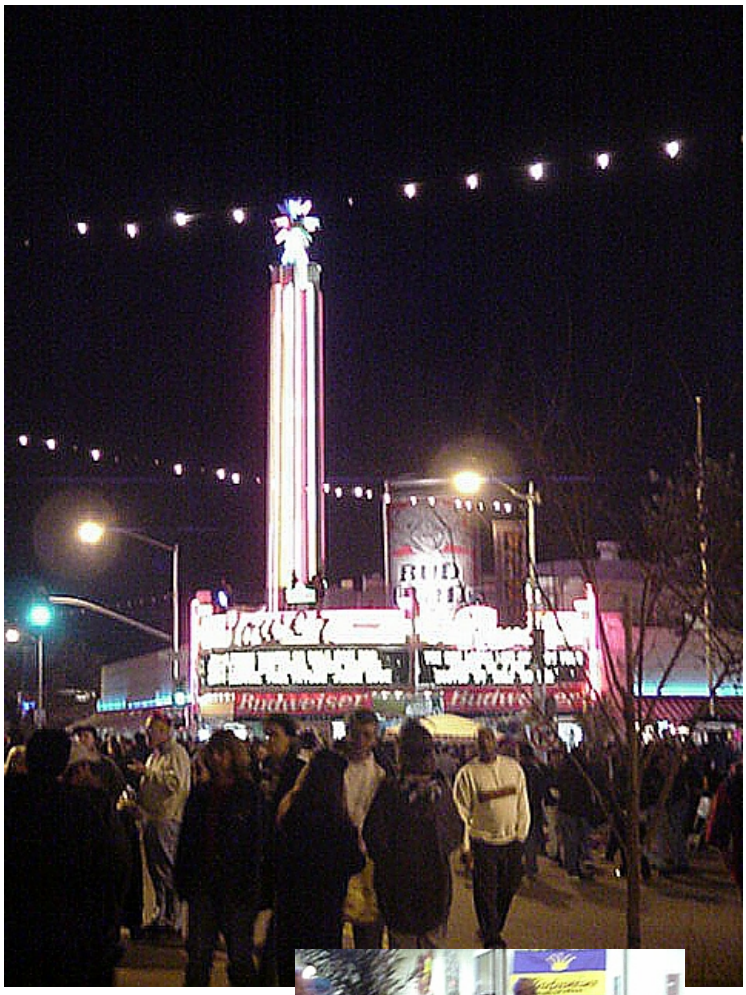
Mardi Gras in Fresno's Tower District Feb. 27, 2001



Easter egg race at the Pinto's house in Monterey -- March 26, 2001

The egg race is underway

Maria congratulates Petrina on a safe landing

Frank tries a long shot!

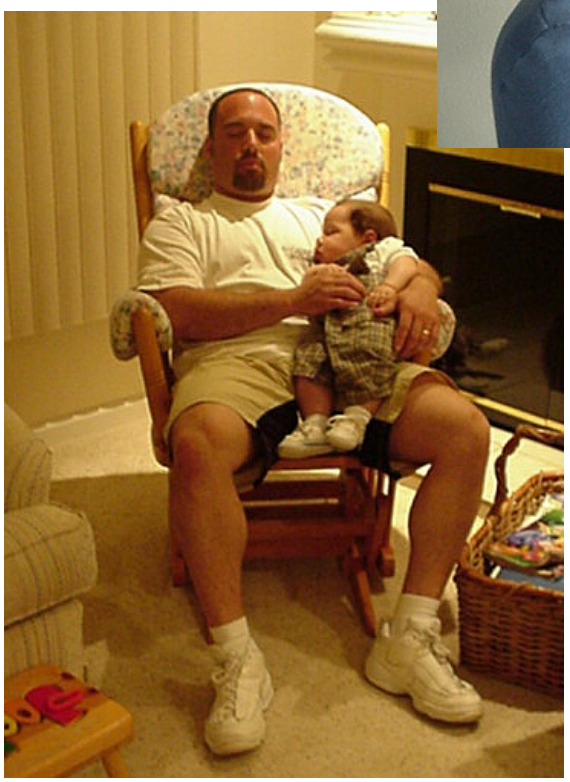
Uncle Marc coaches Joelle

Eggs are flying everywhere!

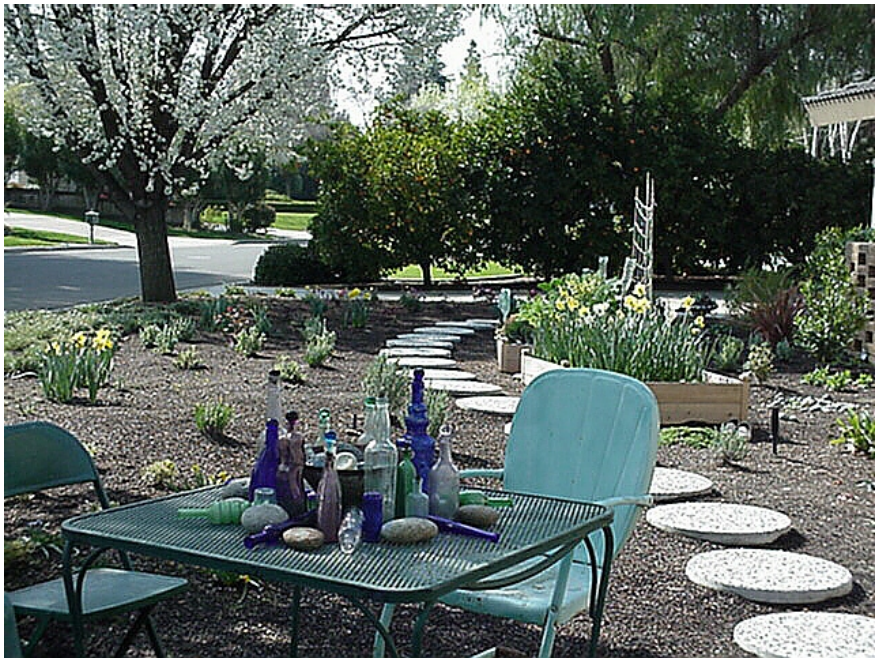
Sharon, Joelle and Petrina inspect the baby peaches

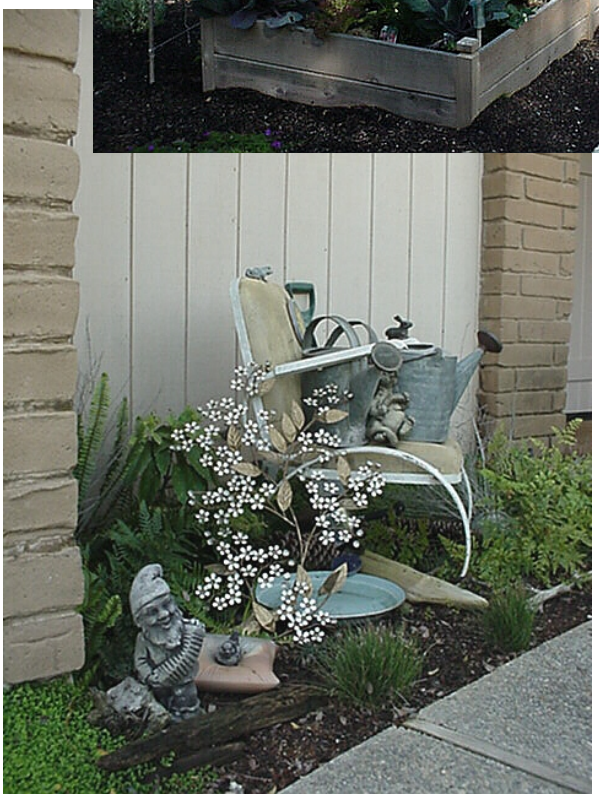
Joseph and Auntie Sharon share a laugh

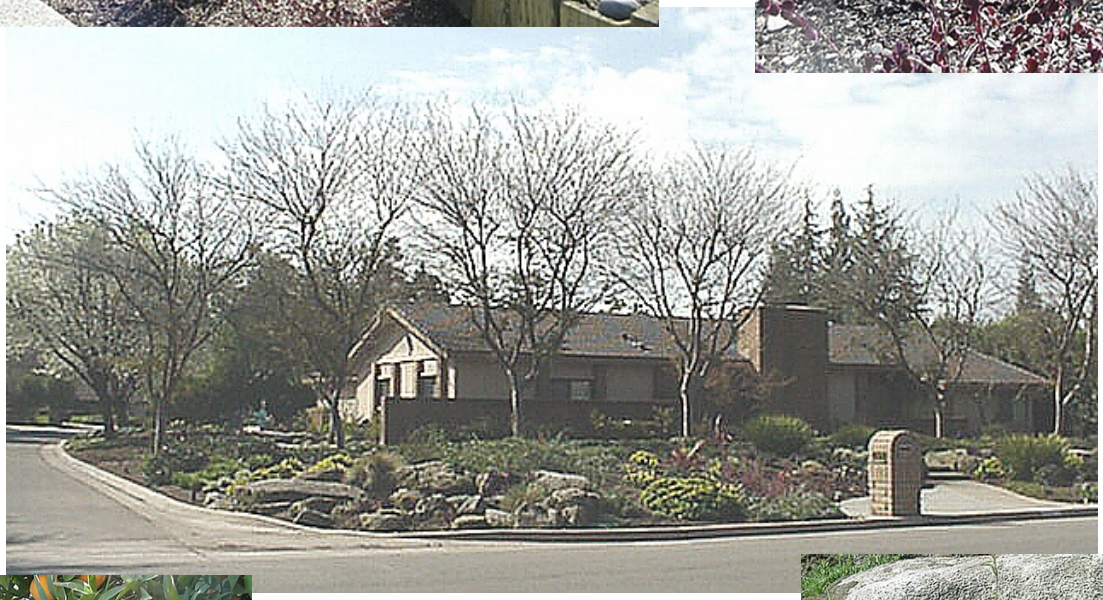
The boys are taking a nap



March 2001 ... in the garden







March 2001 ... in the garden

Easter Sunday in Fresno
April 15, 2001

Sharon, Alexis and Marc dyeing Easter eggs

6th Annual Easter Egg Obstacle Race!

"First timers" Ivy & Linda win first and last place

Land in the gnome's hot tub for bonus points!

Hunting for Easter baskets

Gary's ready for his trip to Italy!

Ivy's forever blowing bubbles

Alexis and her grass picnic blanket

Italy, Spring 2001

April 18: Gary & Sharon Rossi and Nick & Bettie Rossi arrive in Rome in the afternoon and spend our first day exploring the neighborhood around our hotel.

We visited the church of San Pietro in Vincoli.

Michelangelo's Moses

The chains of St. Peter

Roman streets

Trajan's Forum

Our hotel in Rome, the Albergo Romano, was right across the street from the entrance to the Roman Forum.

Thursday, April 19: We started our first morning in Rome with a visit to the Colosseum, just a few steps from our hotel.

The view into the Roman Forum from the Colosseum

Nick and Gary discussing Roman history with a local centurion.

The Curia, home of the Roman senate

Our long day of walking through ancient Rome led us from the Forum to the Campidoglio on our way to the Pantheon.

This is the Mammertine Prison where St. Peter and St. Paul were incarcerated by the Romans.

Near the Pantheon is the church of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva, where the body of St. Catherine lies under the altar.

The Pantheon

From the Pantheon we walked to Piazza Navona, where we admired the three Bernini fountains and enjoyed the chocolate tartufo gelato at Tre Scalini.

We continue our walk through the
Campo dei Fiori to Trastevere

Thursday ends at the
4th century church
of Santa Maria in Trastevere

After a great dinner and
12 hours of walking through
ancient Rome, we took a well
earned ride in a taxi back
to our hotel!

April 20: A rainy Friday morning finds us at Vatican City, where we first tour the Vatican Museum and then visit the church of St. Peter.

Raphael's
School of Athens

The basilica of St. Peter's

Bernini's seven-story tall
bronze canopy over the main altar

Michelangelo's
Pieta

Tomb of St. Peter

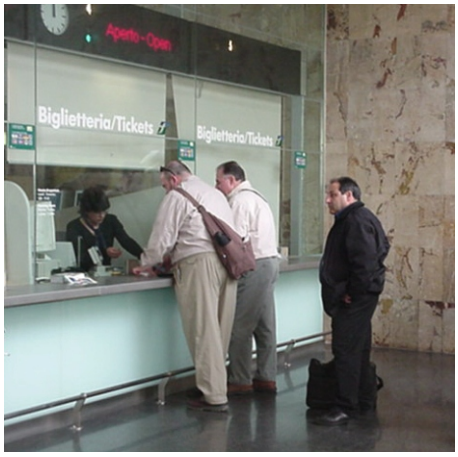
The weather cleared by Friday afternoon and we took an "exciting" taxi ride to the Spanish Steps, with our cab driver working his way through the pedestrian mall of the Via Condotti!

From the Spanish Steps we walked the Via Condotti, Rome's famous shopping street. It's a pedestrian only zone ... in Italy that means the cars drive a little slower through the crowds than usual.

Friday ended with a visit to the Trevi Fountain just before dark. From there we walked back to the Pantheon and had a wonderful dinner. This was our seventh meal in Italy, and for the seventh time Nick said "This is the BEST food I ever ate in my life!"

On Saturday morning, we walked to the train station for a day trip to Orvieto. Near the station, we visited the church of Santa Maria Maggiore.

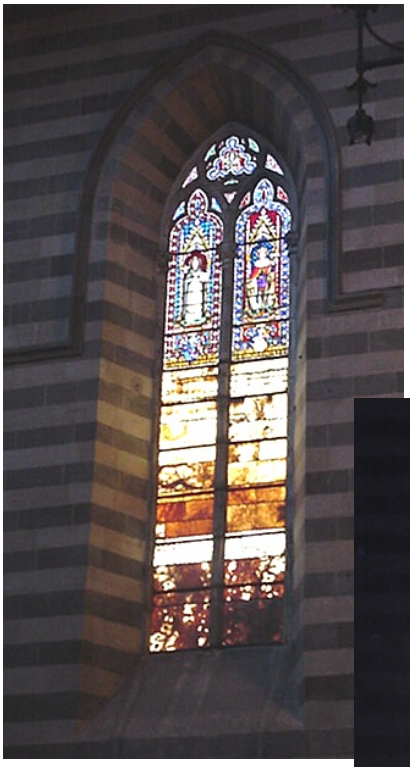
Santa Maria Maggiore



Saturday, April 21:
We bought round trip tickets from Rome's Termini station to Orvieto, about a one and a half hour trip.

At Orvieto, we boarded a funicular for a ride to the cliff-top old town.

Orvieto's Duomo



The Duomo's frescos and alabaster windows were beautiful.

We enjoyed seeing Orvieto's ceramic shops, and Sharon bought some locally made crocheted lace that she couldn't resist.

Sunday, April 22: We picked up our rental car in Rome and drove an hour and a half south to spend the day with Giovanni and Felicetta Rossi and their family in Ceprano.

The whole family got together at Ben and Mariella's home. Mariella made a wonderful dinner that we spent all afternoon enjoying!

Felicetta, Rocky and Mariella

Bettie, Sharon, Felicetta, Mariella and Romina

Nick, Bettie,
Mariella, Ben,
Felicetta, Giovanni,
Sharon and Gary

Monday, April 23: Nick and Gary especially looked forward to this part of the trip. We drove about an hour south of Ceprano into the mountains of Molise to visit the home towns of their father and mother. Chiauci was the first town we visited.

Giovanni and Felicetta were kind enough to give us the key to their house in Chiauci. Felicetta called her neighbor, Anina, and asked her to make us welcome. It was pretty obvious that we weren't from Chiauci, so Anina had no trouble spotting us! We enjoyed a cup of very strong coffee with her in her home.

Bettie on the steps and Sharon in the kitchen of Giovanni & Felicetta's house.

Gary, Anina and Nick

On the lower level of the house, we found the wonderful cheese Felicetta wanted us to take.

We had lunch in Chiauci at La Volpe. Nick said "This is the best prosciutto sandwich I ever had in my whole life!"

What luck! It turned out that this was the feast of San Giorgio, Chiauci's patron saint. There was a procession with the locals carrying the statue of San Giogio out of the church, all the way around the town and then back to the church again.

When the procession reached the church, the statue of San Giorgio was replaced. The priest, Pietro Paulo Monaco from Isernia, spoke a little english and spent some time with us.

When Gary & Nick told Fr. Monaco who their father was, he got someone to open the town clinic (the Ambulatorio Comunale J.F. Kennedy) so we could see the marble plaque with Domenico Rossi's name at the top. Gary remembers playing the accordion at dances at the Italian Hall in Cincinnati in the early 1960's for the fundraisers organized by his dad and others to send money back to Chiauci to build this clinic.

Chiauci is a town of many steps!

As you can see from these pictures, Chiauci perches high on a mountaintop with commanding views of the valley and the surrounding countryside.

After leaving Chiauci, we headed to our mother's home town of Fossalto. We approached it from above, so we got a wonderful view of this beautiful little town. Fossalto is only about 30 minutes from Chiauci.

Fossalto is also on a hilltop, but not the highest hill in the area. The town has very steep streets and lots of steps, like Chiauci, but some of the streets are wider and there are more open piazzas. As you can see by the TV satellite dishes below, it has all the modern conveniences, too!

Sharon & Bettie found a doorway that made them look very tall, and Bettie & Nick had a little trouble standing up straight on a nearly vertical street in Fossalto!

When we left Fossalto, we spotted another hill town called Pietracupa. We couldn't believe how the church seemed to grow right out of the rock, so we parked the car and climbed to the top!

Late Monday afternoon, we left Molise and began our drive up the Adriatic coast towards Venice. We stopped for the night at a seaside town called Fano. The next morning, we took a short walk through the town before driving the last three hours to Venice.

Tuesday, April 24: Venice at last! We parked our car at the Piazzale Roma garage, grabbed our bags and headed for the dock where we boarded a vaporetto for a boat ride down the Grand Canal. We landed at the Rialto Bridge, where our hotel, the Antica Locanda Sturion was located.

The Rialto Bridge over the Grand Canal

After dropping off our bags, we walked to Piazza San Marco.

Doge's Palace

Bridge of Sighs

The most wonderful thing to see in Venice is Venice itself, so we walked, and walked through the tiny alleys and across the bridges and just enjoyed being in such a beautiful place.

In the evening, we stopped to enjoy one of the three orchestras playing in Piazza San Marco. After another wonderful dinner we finally turned in for the night.

After an entire day of walking, we were slightly daunted when we returned to the hotel only to remember we had five flights of steps to climb!

Wednesday, April 25: We rose early and headed for the Doge's Palace. It was a pleasant surprise to find the tour through the palace well marked and well organized ... a rarity for a museum in Italy.

Sharon on the Bridge of Sighs leading from the Doge's Palace to the prison.

Our fearless tour guide studies his map.

After leaving the palace, we climbed to the roof of San Marco's for the view, the horses and the mosaics.

No visit to Venice is complete without a ride in a gondola!

On Wednesday night, we attended a concert of 18th century music, performed at the Scuola San Giovanni by musicians and dancers in period costume.

Thursday, April 26: It was a gorgeous day for a boat ride to the tiny island city of Burano.

Burano is famous for its lace and its colorful houses. Sharon & Bettie visited the lace museum, and we had a great lunch where Nick said "This is the BEST food I ever had in my whole life!"

Coming back to Venice from Burano late on Thursday, we wandered the far reaches of the island, far from where most tourists go. After many twists and turns we finally reached a restaurant near the Arsenale where Sharon & Gary had eaten on their first trip to Venice twelve years ago. The owner, Paulo, welcomed us with a lovely meal and a complimentary glass of wine and dessert.

Friday, April 27: We said goodbye to Venice and hello to our car again. Heading southwest towards Florence, we decided to visit the hill town of San Gimingnano first.

San Gimingnano is a beautiful little town with lots of tall towers. We spent the afternoon walking around the town, and stopped for a gelato at at the Piazza della Cisterna. After dinner, we headed for Florence.

Saturday, April 28: We arrived much too late in Florence the night before, and had quite a bit of trouble finding our hotel and a place to park our car. But Saturday dawned bright and clear and we had a mission! We visited the Baptistery first, then the Accademia to see Michelangelo's David.

We crossed the Ponte Vecchio to visit the Boboli Gardens, stopped for gelato, of course, and then headed for the Uffizi Gallery late in the afternoon. After an exhausting and exhilarating day, we found a fine restaurant for dinner where Nick once again exclaimed "This is the BEST food I ever had in my whole life!"

Sunday, April 29: Another glorious spring day! We left Florence early and headed south into Tuscany to visit several small hill towns. First on the list was Bagno Vignoni, a small town built around a hot spring.

The next town we visited was Pienza. There were so many tourists in town, we couldn't get a table in a restaurant. So we made an impromptu picnic lunch out of prosciutto sandwiches from the deli and our daily gelato ... which always tastes better while being eaten on the steps of a 16th century church.

After Pienza, we headed for Assisi. On the way we took a short detour and discovered a very pretty little hilltop town called Montefollonico. We seemed to be the only people in town!

Monday, April 30: We woke up in Assisi, and started our day at the basilica of St. Francis to view the incredible Giotto frescos.

Assisi is a very steep town, full of steps and plenty of tiny streets. It's always amazing to see a car or truck coming your way!

We spent Nick & Bettie's whole last day in Italy exploring Assisi. It had been a wonderful two weeks together and we were sad to see it come to an end. The good company, great sights and delicious food will stay in our memories forever.

We left Assisi late in the day, drove two hours to the Rome airport and had a final farewell seaside dinner in Fiumicino. Gary & Sharon were driving south towards Sicily the next day to continue their trip for another two weeks!

May 2: Nick & Bettie flew home to Cleveland yesterday. Gary & Sharon spent the day driving about seven hours from Rome to the tip of the Italian peninsula and spent the night in Catona, near Reggio di Calabria. On the morning of May 2 we rose early and took the ferry across the straits to Messina, Sicily. From there it was about 30 minutes to Taormina, on the east coast of Sicily.

The Pensione Svizzera in Taormina was a lovely place to stay. Our room had a spectacular view up the coastline. It's easy to see why Taormina is such a popular town. It crowns a mountain top 300 meters above the sea and is full of fine restaurants and shops. Sicily is famous for its desserts ... we tried our first in Taormina and our favorites were the cannoli and the mandorle.

Taormina's 3rd century B.C. Teatro Greco was magnificent. From the seats you have a spectacular view of the ocean and Mt. Etna.

The Parco Duchi di Cesaro, just below the theater, was created by an english woman in the Victorian era.

On the coast below Taormina is a small beach town called Mazzaro. Next to our hotel was a funivia, or cable car, that whisked you down to the seaside in a few minutes.

Since the traffic signs don't seem to matter, you can put a stop sign wherever you like!

Traditional Sicilian puppets on display at the civic museum.

Friday, May 4: We drove from Taormina to Siracusa in the morning. After getting just a "little bit" lost and trying to get directions in a town that has never seen a tourist, we finally found Limonetto, a family farm just outside Siracusa where we spent the next three nights.

Sharon and the wild papyrus at the Fontana Aretusa

Dancing in the park!

We spent Friday afternoon and evening exploring the island of Ortygia, the oldest part of Siracusa founded in 734 B.C. by the Greeks. Giorgio and Raimundo (Giorgio is the horse) gave us a two hour tour of the island in broken english (Raimundo's) and broken Italian (Gary's).

Ortygia is a pleasure to walk around. The whole island is about a square mile of narrow streets, crumbing buildings and beautiful piazzas. We noticed several posters that announced a procession and mass on Sunday for the feast of Santa Lucia so we made plans to return on Sunday night.

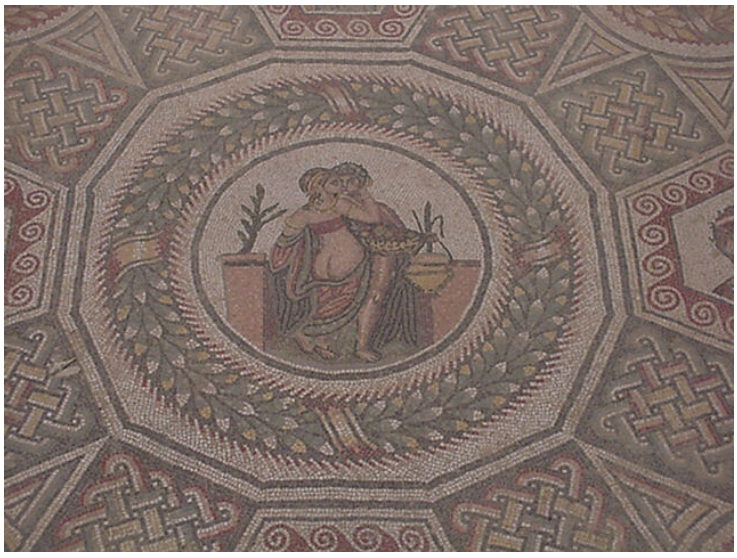
Saturday, May 5 was rainy and chilly and we were on our way to Caltagirone and Casale. All through Sicily we had been seeing literally millions of wildflowers ... we were so taken by a roadside view of cows in a field of yellow flowers that we just had to stop and admire the scene.

Caltagirone is famous for its ceramics. After negotiating some incredibly narrow and winding streets, Gary found a parking space right at the foot of the Scala di Santa Maria del Monte. Each of the 142 steps is decorated with hand-painted ceramic tiles and no two are the same. The stairway and the surrounding neighborhood are lined with ceramic workshops.

After visiting several ceramics studios, we had lunch at a restaurant on the steps, then headed for the town of Piazza Armerina to visit the Roman villa at Casale.

The early 4th century A.D. Roman villa at Casale is Sicily's most important Roman ruins. It is justly famous for the incredible array of mosaics on the floors of the four groups of connected buildings.

The villa was probably the hunting lodge of Maximian, co-emperor with Diocletian. The extraordinary mosaics cover nearly every floor. Their excellent condition is probably due to the fact that a mudslide had kept this site covered and hidden from view for a thousand years until it was finally excavated in 1950.



Gary's dream job!

On Sunday, May 6 the weather was back to gorgeous and sunny! In the morning we visited the archaeological musem of Siracusa, the greek theater and a grotto called the "Ear of Dionysius" where Athenian captives were held after a battle for Siracusa in 435 B.C.

WWII gun emplacement

At 7pm we were at the Piazza del Duomo again to join the procession of Santa Lucia. The square was packed with people, and a great cheer went up when the simulacrum appeared from the doors of the church. The civic band began playing, as the incredibly heavy, silver plated image was lifted by about 50 men, carried about 20 feet, then set down while the bearers gathered their strength again. We followed the procession, right behind the band, for about an hour.

As darkness came on, we left the procession and had a great pizza and salad at Pizzeria Nona Margherita. By 10pm, we had wandered back to Piazza del Duomo expecting the procession to have ended as scheduled with a 9pm mass at the Duomo. But the piazza was empty! After a gelato at the cafe on the piazza, we started back to our car when we heard the civic band in the distance. It had been four hours since the procession had started, and we found the band, a crowd of several hundred people, and a very tired group of green-hatted bearers still struggling to move Santa Lucia, 20 feet at a time, back to the Duomo ... with a quarter mile still to go.

Monday, May 7: We drove through the heart of Sicily from southeast to northwest. We stopped for a lunch of wild boar and home-grown mushrooms in the mountain town of Petralia Sottana. We had to stop several times to admire the beautiful wildflowers!

The cathedral of Monreale is just outside Palermo. It's a 12th century Norman church showing Norman, Arab and Byzantine elements. The cloisters adjacent to the church were magnificent.

The walls of the aisles, sanctuary and apse are entirely covered with gilded mosaics.

A traditional Sicilian pony cart and a very tired dog.

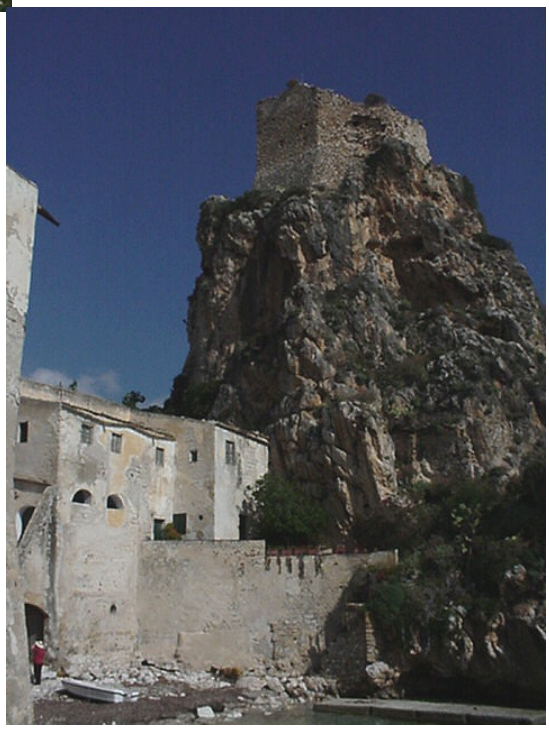
Tuesday, May 8: Late Monday afternoon we left Monreale and drove the last hour to the tiny village of Scopello on the north-western tip of Sicily. We set up for the next three nights at the Pensione Tranchina, and rose early on Tuesday to visit Erice and Segesta.

Erice is a medieval hill town in a spectacular setting. It sits on a mountain top 2500 feet above the sea and is dominated by the 11th century Castello di Venere, built atop an ancient temple of Venus.

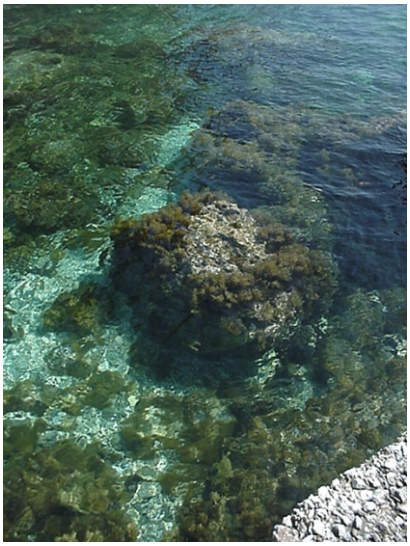
The castle was deserted when we arrived early in the morning. we were delighted with the abundant wildflowers that seemed to fill every nook and cranny and spent the morning exploring both the castle and the town.

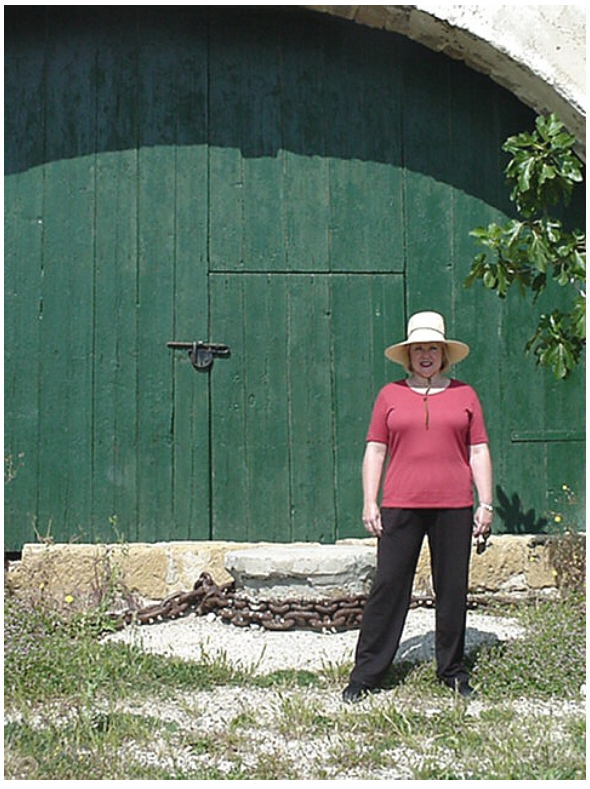
After a fine lunch in town, we braved the incredibly narrow, winding road back down the mountain and drove about 15 miles to Segesta.

The greek temple at Segesta dates from 430 B.C. The setting is simply beautiful, and it was easy to spend the rest of the afternoon soaking it all in.



Wednesday, May 9:
We woke up to a warm, sunny day in Scopello. Just below the town is the Tonnara, a tuna processing plant that ceased operations in the 1980's. The place is literally perfect: an old abandoned building surrounded by rows of rusting anchors gives onto a small beach with the clearest, bluest water you've ever seen. The cove is protected by faraglioni (rock towers) jutting out of the sea.





This was the view from under Sharon's hat!

We tore ourselves away from the Tonnara, and drove about 30 minutes to San Vito lo Capo, a small fishing and resort town at the northwest tip of Sicily. It's surrounded by spectacular mountains and has the broadest sand beach in Sicily. It also has great gelato at the corner shop in the photo below!

Pensione Tranchina, our home in Scopello for three days

We returned to Scopello that afternoon and spent the rest of the day walking around the tiny town and relaxing at the cafe in the main piazza.

The town's spring-fed fountain where everybody comes from miles around to fill their water jugs.

On Thursday, May 10 we left Scopello, drove through Palermo (never again!) and stopped in Cefalu, a beach resort on the northern coast of Sicily.

The apse and vault of Cefalu's 12th century Norman church are covered in beautiful, gilded mosaics.

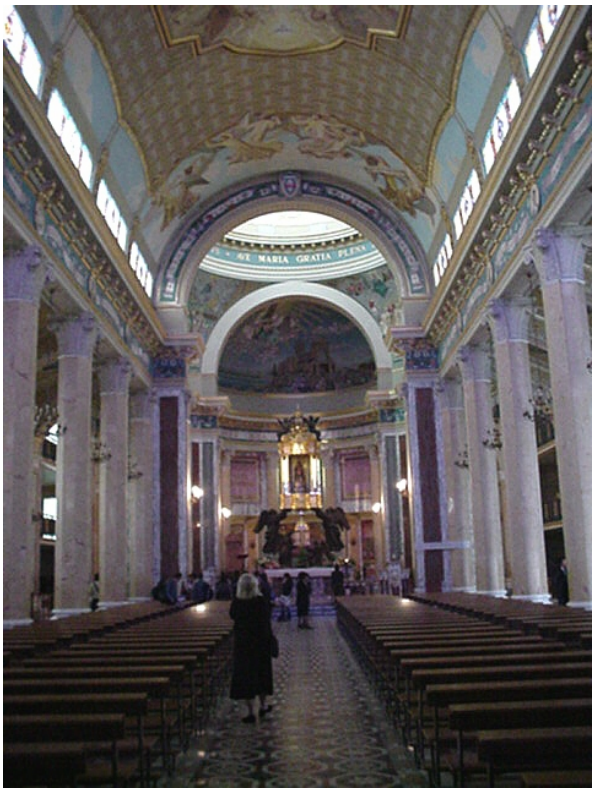
Walking the narrow streets of Cefalu is a challenge!

Cefalu is a very popular package-tour destination for northern Europeans.

The lavatoio is a 16th century laundry built over an ancient spring.

After lunch, we made a stop at the mountain top ruins of the Greek city of Tyndaris.

Next to the ruins, and built in 1960, is the Sanctuary of the Madonna. This is a pilgrimage site that houses the famous Black Madonna.



Late Thursday, we crossed the straits back to mainland Italy. The captain of the ship invited us into the pilot room, but he wouldn't let Gary steer!

Another indecipherable Italian road sign (with blinking plant?)

Friday, May 11: We rose early and drove 4 hours north to Paestum, one of the best collections of Greek temples anywhere. It was founded in the sixth century B.C. and is in a remarkable state of preservation.

Temple of Ceres

"One Grecian Urn" performed by Sharon for Alexis & Janet.

The Temple of Ceres stands alone, about a ten minute walk from the other two temples of Hera and Neptune.

Temple of Neptune

The on-site museum was a pleasant surprise with beautiful pottery and orginal Greek tomb paintings. Another nice surprise was the terrific gelato at a cafe near the Temple of Neptune!

Near Paestum is the mountaintop town of Castellabate. We spent Friday night at La Mola, a small pensione perched on the edge of the cliff. The sunset views from our room were spectacular!

Saturday, May 12: After a wonderful breakfast served on the terrace, we explored the small town of Castellabate.

From Castellabate, it was only an hour's drive past Naples to the ruins of Pompei.

We spent the whole afternoon exploring Pompei. It was buried in a lava flow from Mt. Vesuvius in 79 A.D.

Gary's standing behind what would have been a fast food stand 2000 years ago.

A tile mosaic in the entrance of a house says "Cave Canem" (Beware of the dog)

The House of Faun was one of Pompei's largest homes.

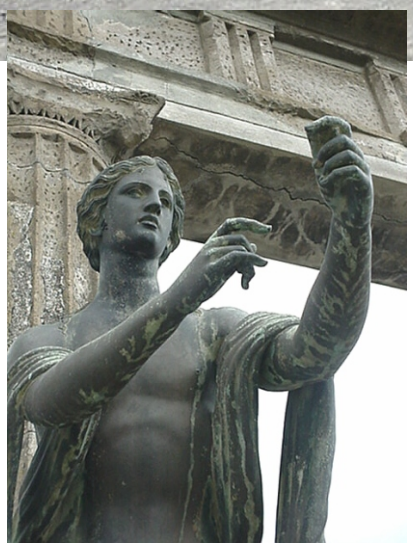
The House of Vetti was owned by two merchant brothers who were obviously into erotic art!

The frescoes are remarkably preserved.

Gary examined an ancient Pompeian grain mill in the local bakery.

The forum area was Pompei's main meeting place.

When Gary took Maria the restroom attendant's picture, she smiled and said "Ah, the toilets of Pompei!"



Casts of volcano victims

We said goodbye to Pompei, and drove north to Rome. After four weeks in Italy it was time to go home. The first two weeks spent with Nick & Bettie seeing Rome, Venice and Florence were terrific, and the visit with our relatives was a joy. Our time in Sicily and southern Italy was filled with good weather, gorgeous wildflowers, beautiful scenery, great food and truly inspiring Greek and Roman ruins. It was a trip to remember, and we can't wait to do it again!

Sunday, June 17 was Father's Day and we were happy that Alexis could visit for the weekend. Sharon & Alexis bought Gary an "Aqua Golf" set with velcro'd wiffle golf balls and floating "greens"! It was a very hot day, so retrieving the balls was actually more fun than chipping them ... besides, Alexis was better at it than her dad!

July 2001
Alexis' visit at
Raj & Shawna's
home in Cincinnati

Alexis at Steve and Monica's home with Maya and Nathan

Alexis and Janet visit Mike, Tina, Sage and Solana in Cleveland

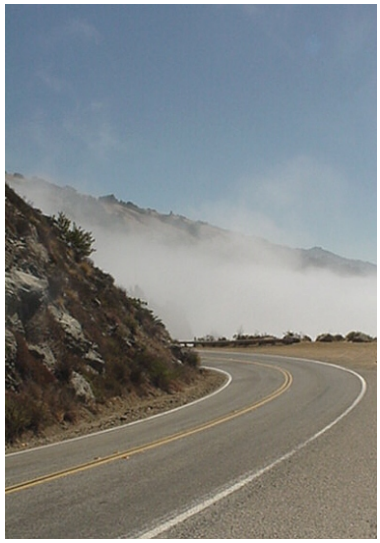
Papa Nick & Nonna Bettie with Sage & Solana

July 2001
Ron & Rosalie's 40th anniversary party

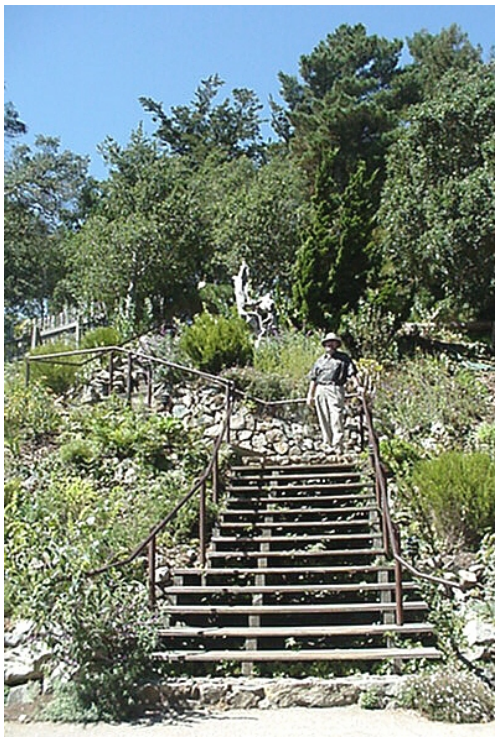
August 5, 2001
Vivian's tomatos, peaches and eggplant

September 3, 2001
Alexis painting in
Sharon's studio

September 5, 2001
Big Sur, CA



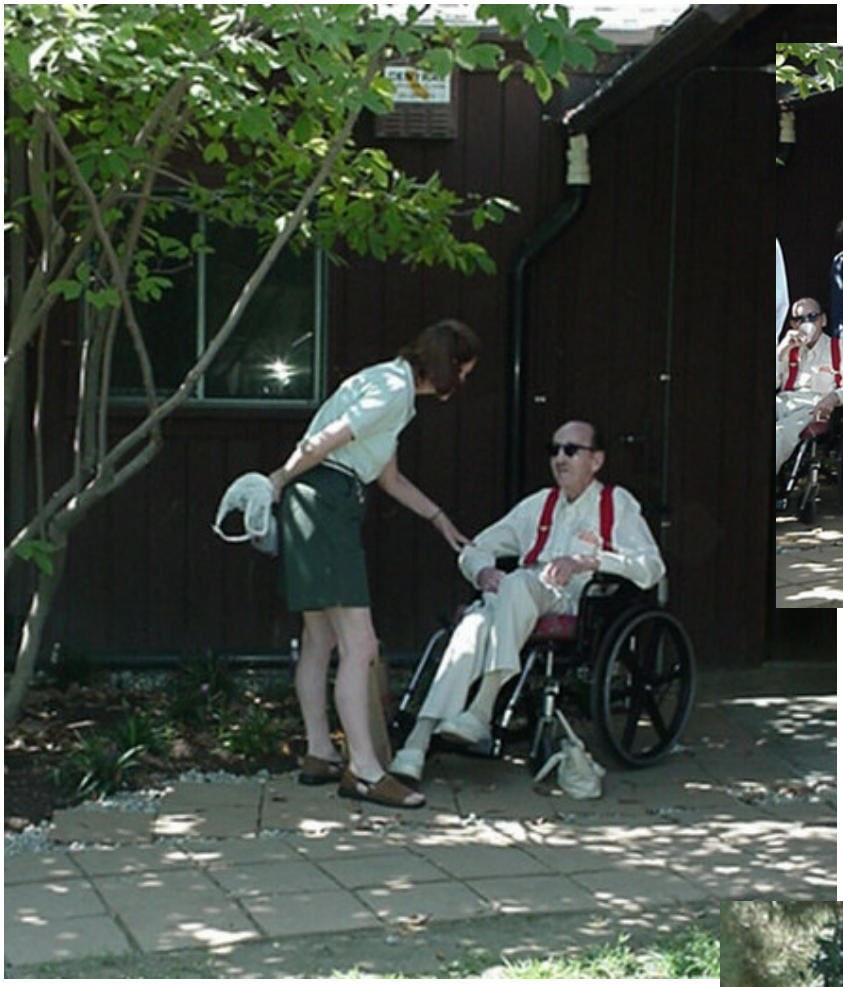
Coast Gallery



Lunch at Nepenthe

Sunday
September 2, 2001

Sunday
September 2, 2001



Sunday
September 2, 2001

Sunday
September 2, 2001

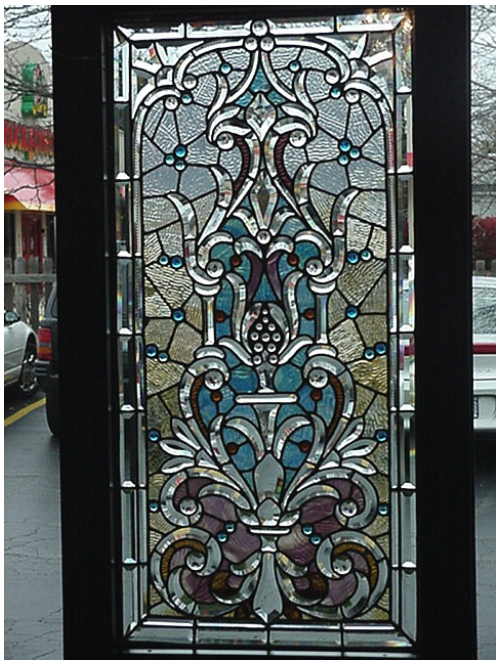
Sunday
September 2, 2001

September 4, 2001
Gary, Sharon, Marc & Amanda
at Goldsmith Seeds in Gilroy, CA

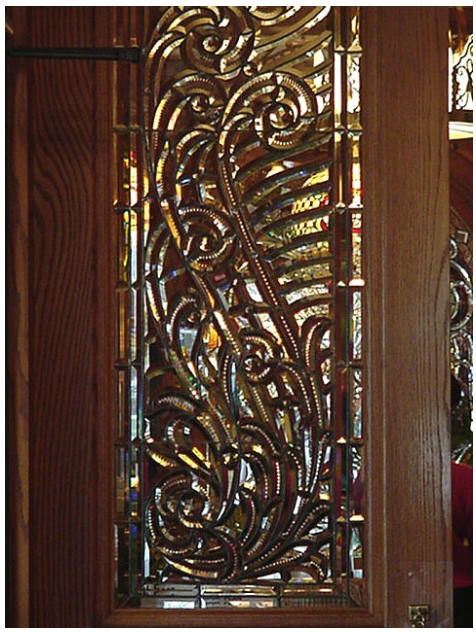
September 17, 2001
The Pinto Family visits Fresno

Joelle and Petrina making art in Auntie Sharon's studio

Everybody in the pool!



October 24, 2001
Sharon, Mom and Gary having breakfast and enjoying the stained glass at Walker Bros. in Buffalo Grove.

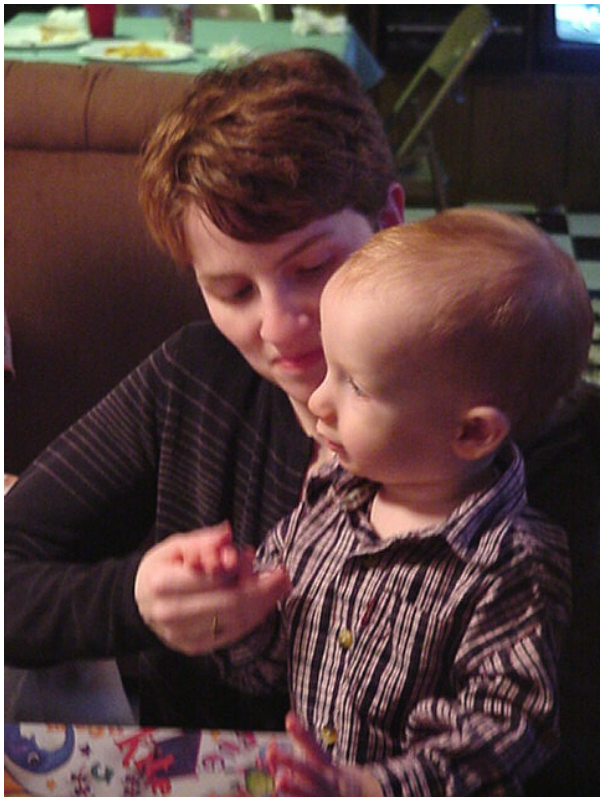


October 27, 2001
Halloween party
at Raj & Shawna's
house

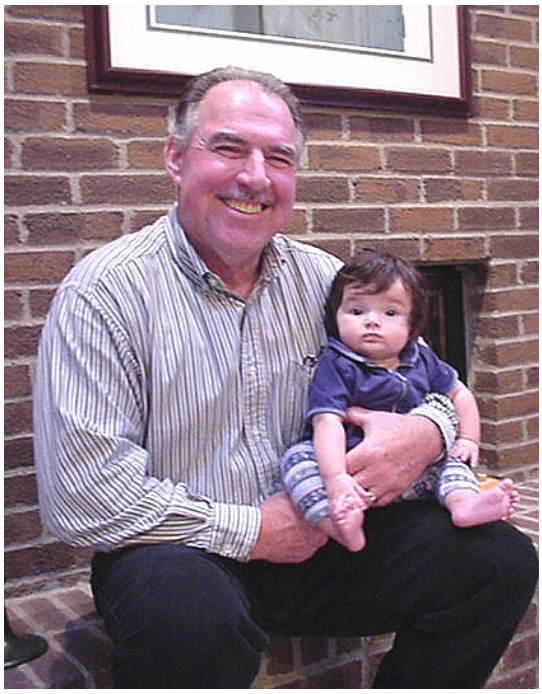
Haunted Castle in Loveland, Ohio

October 28, 2001
Cincinnati, Ohio

Nathan's almost ready to walk!



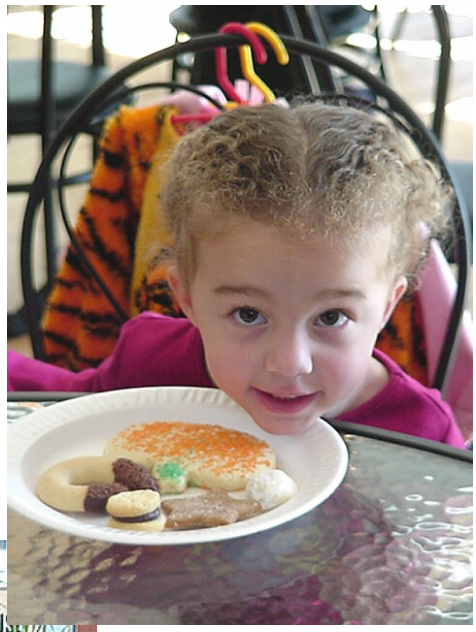
Maya wants to try playing the accordion!



October 29, 2001
Cleveland, Ohio
at Nick & Bettie's house

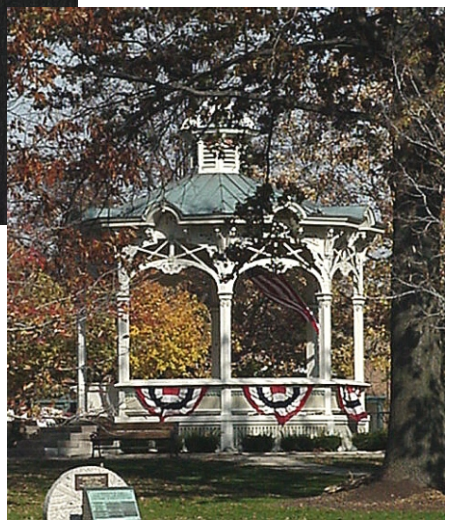
October 30, 2001
Visiting Cleveland's Metroparks and Little Italy

Showing off our Halloween costumes



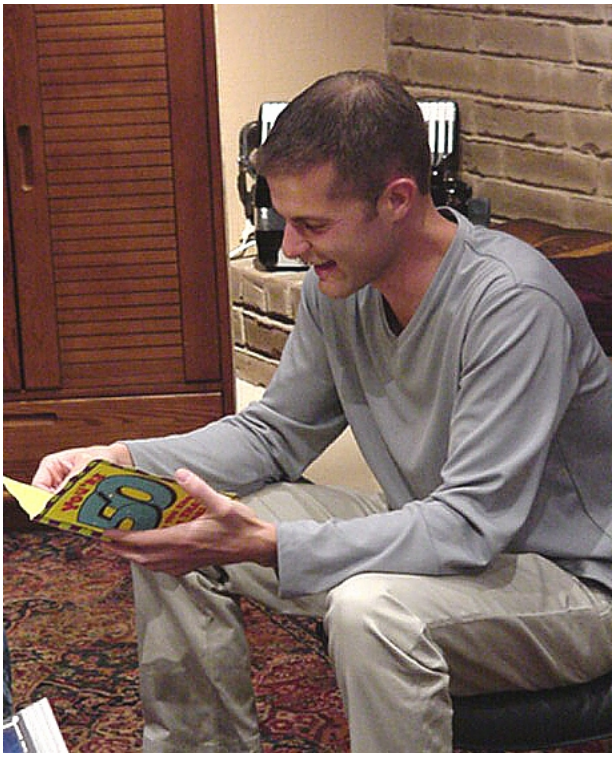
Fall colors at the Cleveland Botanical Garden

October 31, 2001
Medina, Ohio



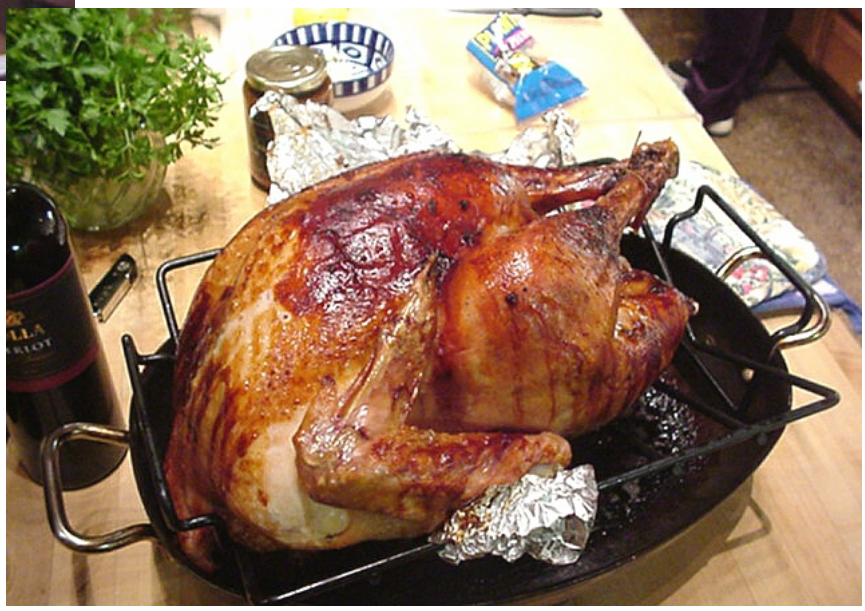
Halloween 2001
San Francisco

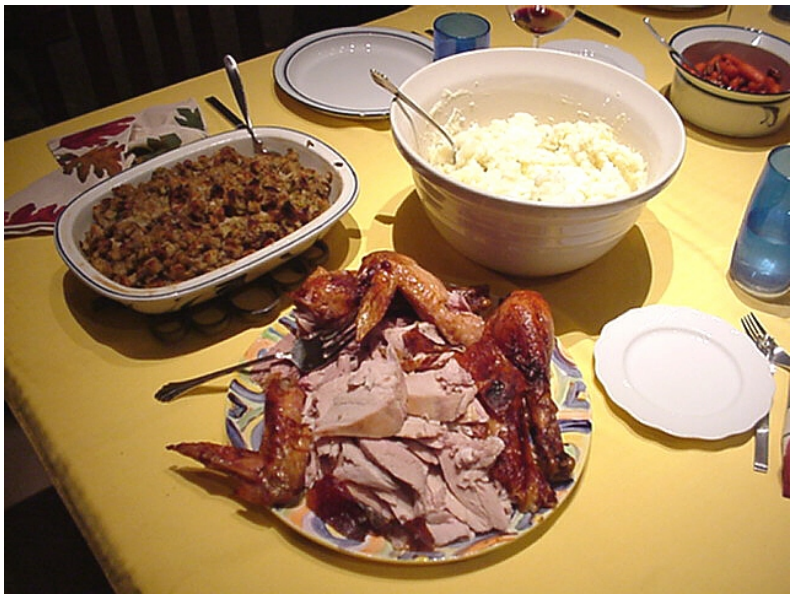
November 18, 2001
Marc's 32 birthday
with friends and family

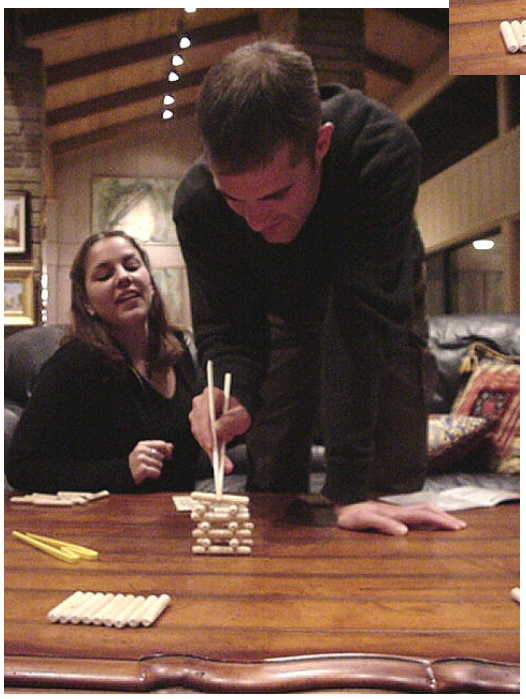


Crayola

November 22, 2001
Alexis cooks Thanksgiving dinner for the family



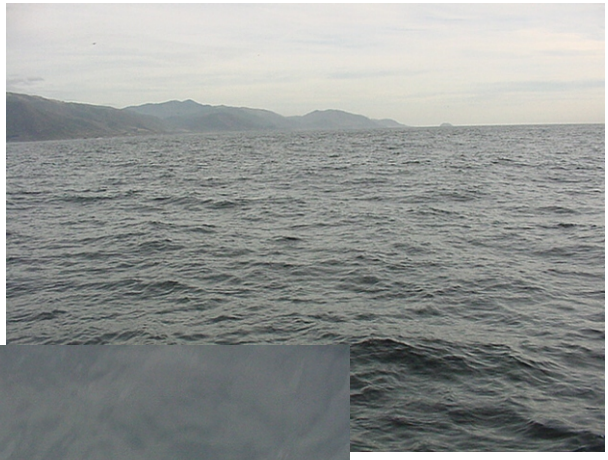




November 22, 2001

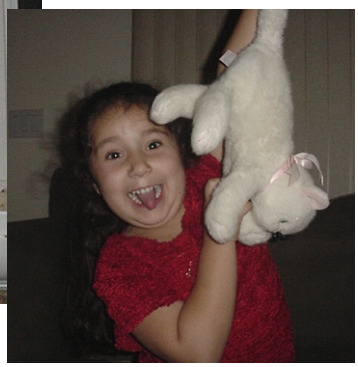
November 11, 2001

December 16, 2001
Chris & Katy Burns, Marc, Alexis and Sharon went whale watching on Monterey Bay.

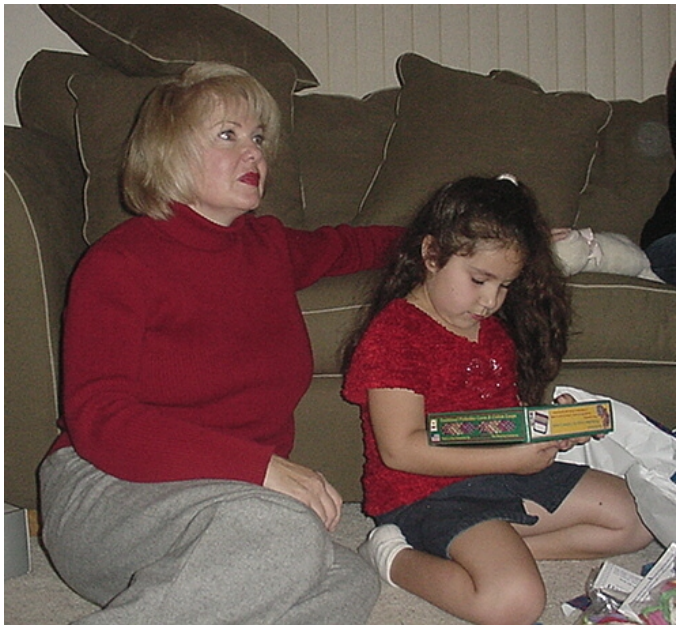


It was a little early for the gray whale migration, but lots of dolphins and sea lions were seen.

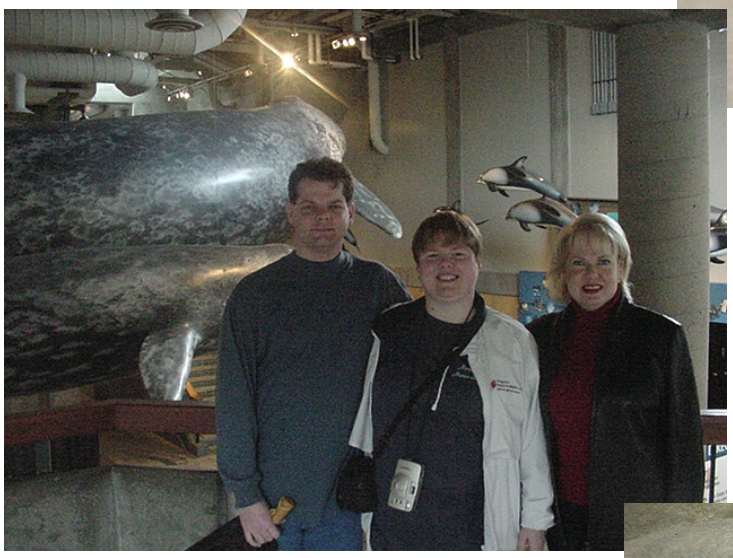
Sunday night dinner with the Pinto family

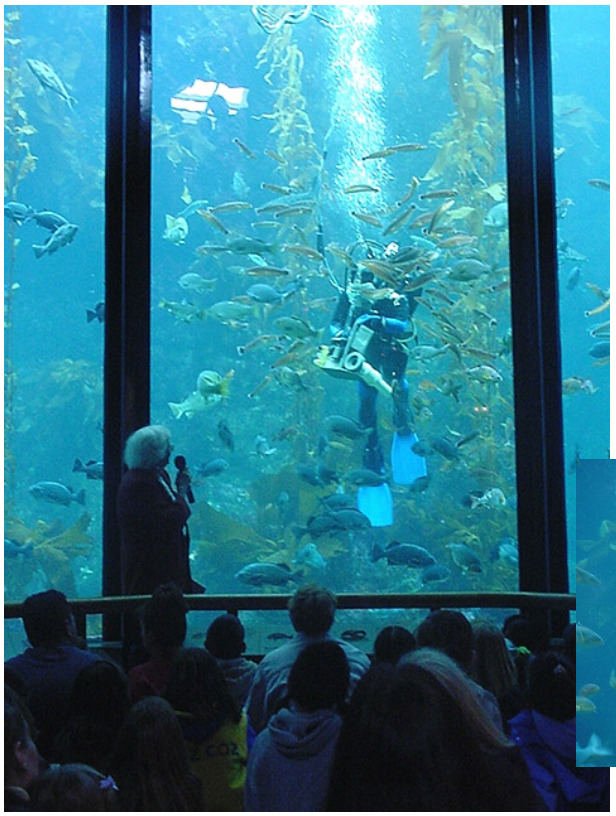


Early Christmas presents for the kids

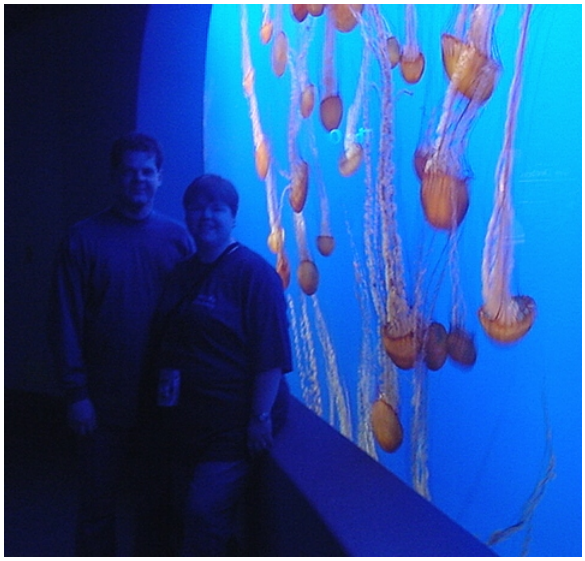


Joelle, Petrina and Joseph like playing their new piano



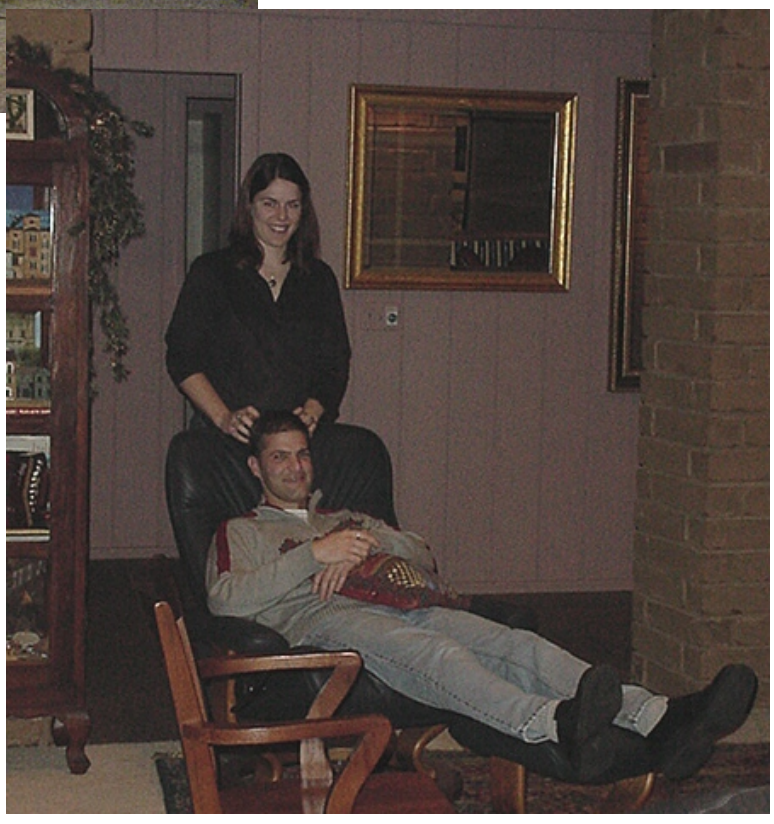


December 17, 2001
Chris, Katy, Sharon and Gary visited the Monterey Bay Aquarium



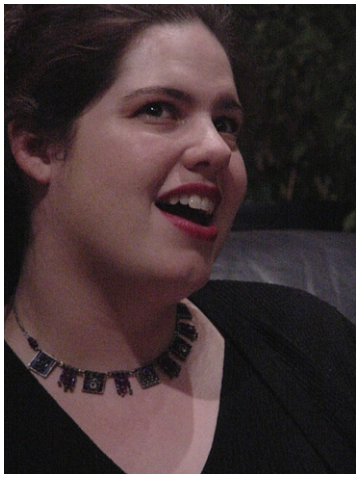
After the Aquarium, we visited Carmel for lunch and shopping. The next day Chris & Katy visited Fresno.

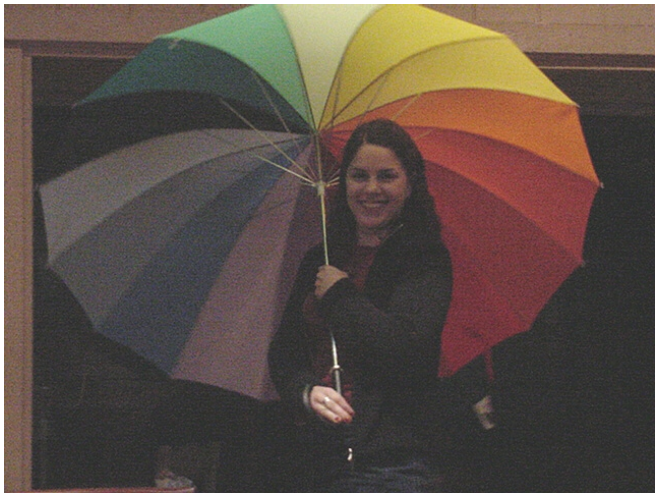
December 24, 2001
Alexis, Marc, Amanda, Gary and Sharon enjoy a wonderful dinner on Christmas Eve.



December 25, 2001
Christmas day found Sharon and Alexis back in the kitchen preparing another delicious dinner for everyone to enjoy.

After dinner, we finally got to open our presents!





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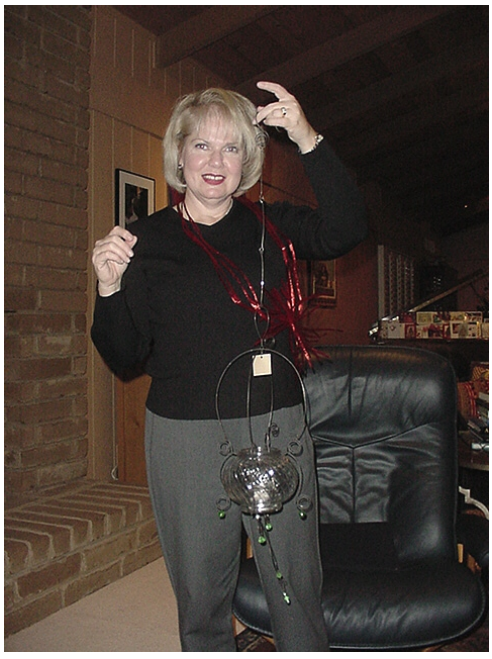
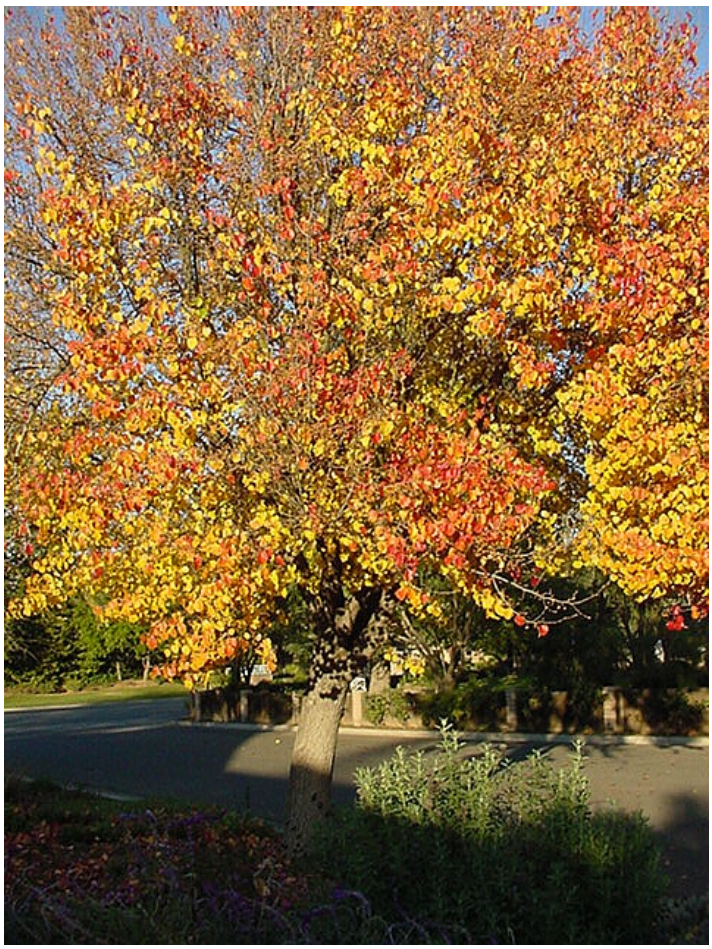

Marie

Fresno
December 15, 2001

Persimmon tree



Fresno
December 15, 2001